

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI
NORTHERN DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GOVERNMENT

VS.

CRIMINAL NOS. 3:23CR62, 3:23CR63

HUNTER THOMAS ELWARD

DEFENDANT

TRANSCRIPT OF SENTENCING

BEFORE THE HONORABLE TOM S. LEE
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

MARCH 19, 2024
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

REPORTED BY: TERI B. NORTON, RMR, FCRR, RDR
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14 PROBATION OFFICERS: ALLIE WHITTEN, JAMIE HARRELL

15
16 ALSO PRESENT: TODD GEE, U.S. ATTORNEY
PAT LEMON, ASSISTANT U.S. ATTORNEY
17 LINDSAY CRANFORD, DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL
LUKE WILLIAMSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC
18 INTEGRITY DIVISION, ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

19
20 MALIK SHABAZZ, ESQ., AND TRENT WALKER, ESQ.,
REPRESENTING EDDIE PARKER AND MICHAEL JENKINS.

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1 **THE COURT:** Good morning. In Case Number 3:23cr62
2 and Case Number 3:23cr63, the sentencing disposition for Hunter
3 Thomas Elward is set for this morning.

4 I see Mr. Hollomon representing Mr. Elward, Ms. Chalk and
5 Ms. Haynes. Ms. Chalk, would you introduce your colleagues to
6 the Court, please, ma'am.

7 **MS. CHALK:** Yes, Your Honor. Next to me is
8 Christopher Perras. And next to him is Glenda Haynes. And on
9 the other side of Glenda Haynes is Daniel Grunert. Christopher
10 and Daniel are both with the Criminal Civil Rights Division out
11 of Main Justice, Your Honor.

12 **THE COURT:** Thank you. Let the defendant, Mr.
13 Elward, and his counsel come to the podium.

14 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Good morning, Your Honor.

15 **THE COURT:** Good morning.

16 Mr. Elward, back in August of last year, you entered a
17 plea of guilty in these two cases, 11 counts in 3:23cr62 in an
18 information, and one count in 3:23cr63, as follows: Counts 1
19 and 13, conspiracy against rights; Counts 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 10,
20 deprivation of rights under color of law; Count 9, discharge of
21 a firearm during a crime of violence; Count 11, conspiracy to
22 obstruct justice; and Count 12, obstruction of justice.

23 And then you pled guilty to -- in Case Number 3:23cr63, to
24 a count of deprivation of rights under color of law. And you
25 are before the Court today for sentencing.

1 Have you received and read the presentence investigation
2 report with your lawyer, Mr. Hollomon?

3 **THE DEFENDANT:** Yes, Your Honor.

4 **THE COURT:** Did you understand and was he able to
5 answer questions that you needed to fully understand the
6 report?

7 **THE DEFENDANT:** Yes, Your Honor.

8 **THE COURT:** Mr. Hollomon, do you confirm that you
9 went over the presentence report, explained it to him as
10 necessary, answering any questions, and do you believe that he
11 understands what is reported in the presentence investigation
12 report?

13 **MR. HOLLOMON:** I do, Your Honor. We went over the
14 report extensively and filed objections.

15 **THE COURT:** With regard to objections, the addendum
16 filed by the probation officer reflects that there is an
17 outstanding objection in the addendum -- I have a lot of
18 papers, and I'm looking for the copy of the -- a sentencing
19 enhancement of two levels for more than minimal planning. Does
20 that accurately describe it, Mr. Hollomon?

21 **MR. HOLLOMON:** It does, Your Honor.

22 **THE COURT:** Do you have anything else to say in
23 support of that objection?

24 **MR. HOLLOMON:** No, Your Honor, we stand on the
25 submission.

1 **THE COURT:** The Court resolves that objection with a
2 ruling that there was more than minimal planning shown in the
3 messages and preparation by the officers before they made their
4 break-in to the house where the victims were located. So that
5 objection is overruled.

6 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Your Honor.

7 **THE COURT:** Is there anything further in connection
8 with any of that?

9 **MR. HOLLOMON:** No, Your Honor. The probation officer
10 agreed to our initial objection on the -- with regard to
11 paragraphs 151 and 157 and guideline 2A2.2(b) (2) (B), so no
12 further argument.

13 **THE COURT:** I noted that, and the probation officer
14 said that that was the lone remaining objection.

15 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Yes, Your Honor.

16 **THE COURT:** There is a motion pending by the
17 government. I'm going to ask counsel to come to the bench to
18 deal with that.

19 **(THE BENCH CONFERENCE IS SEALED AND FILED UNDER SEPARATE**
20 **COVER.)**

21 **THE COURT:** With regard to the presentence report,
22 I'm confirming the counts of conviction, Counts in 23-62, Count
23 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 13, which provide for not more than
24 ten years imprisonment, and Count 1 of the other case, 63,
25 which provides for not more than ten years imprisonment, Counts

1 11 and 12 in Case Number 62, not more than 20 years, and then
2 Count 9, ten years consecutive to all other counts.

3 So the guideline provisions in this case, the ranges for
4 all counts except Count 9 -- I say case, cases, both cases --
5 is 97 to 121 months, and additionally, for Count 9, ten years
6 consecutive to all other counts. Do counsel for both sides
7 understand that, and is there any need for further explanation?

8 **MS. CHALK:** The government agrees, Your Honor.

9 **MR. HOLLOMON:** The defendant agrees, Your Honor.

10 **THE COURT:** All right.

11 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Your Honor, should we go back to the
12 podium at this point?

13 **THE COURT:** Yes, sir. With that said, the Court
14 adopts the presentence investigation report both as to proposed
15 factual findings and guideline sentence application.

16 I'm going to ask counsel for the government, do you have
17 submissions to offer with regard to victim -- victims' impact
18 and statements by victims?

19 **MS. CHALK:** Yes, Your Honor, we have submitted the
20 victim impact statements for EP, MJ, and AS to the Court. EP
21 would like to make a statement to the Court. I plan to read
22 the victim impact statement for MJ and AS. And I have one,
23 maybe two statements for MJ's family.

24 **THE COURT:** We will take all of that up now and you
25 may return to counsel table.

1 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Your Honor.

2 **MS. CHALK:** Thank you, Your Honor.

3 **THE COURT:** While she is preparing, the Court will
4 acknowledge having received sentencing memoranda from both the
5 government and the defense, including exhibits. I've received
6 some character letters attesting to positive attributes of the
7 defendant from family members and friends. Then, in addition,
8 a number of letters from members on the letterhead of the NAACP
9 of Rankin County and a petition, with many people having signed
10 that. All of that will be handed forth to the clerk for
11 insertion into the record. And I think I referenced the
12 sentencing memorandum. Okay. Proceed.

13 **MS. CHALK:** Thank you, Your Honor.

14 With me is Attorney Malik Shabazz, Your Honor, and he
15 intends to read the victim impact statement for Eddie Parker
16 and Michael Jenkins, and then I will continue from there, if it
17 please the Court.

18 **THE COURT:** All right. Proceed, Mr. Shabazz.

19 **MR. SHABAZZ:** Good morning, Your Honor. My name is
20 Malik Shabazz, M-A-L-I-K, S-H-A-B-A-Z-Z. I am attorney for
21 Mr. Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker, the victims in this
22 matter, who will not be speaking. I will speak on their behalf
23 due to the trauma they have undergone.

24 This is Michael Jenkins statement:

25 "January 24th was the worst day of my life. I was

1 brutally beaten and nearly killed by the Rankin County
2 Sheriff's Department, also known as the Goon Squad. I never
3 would have thought a night of hanging out with friends would
4 nearly cost me my life. They beat, kicked, tased, insulted,
5 waterboarded and humiliated me, and that will forever be
6 engraved in my mind and my heart.

7 "I am hurt. I am broken. I am ashamed and embarrassed by
8 the entire situation. They tried to take my manhood from me.
9 They did some unimaginable things to me, and the effects of it
10 will linger with me for the rest of my life.

11 "All of the things I used to enjoy doing in my life has
12 been affected. I'm a musician and a singer, and now, because
13 of a gun shot wound to my jaw, I can no longer do what I love,
14 and that is to sing.

15 "I play the drums for my church, and because I was shot in
16 the face, it affected my vision, so I can no longer play. My
17 timing, my train of thought, my judgment has been so clouded
18 since I was shot by Hunter Elward.

19 "Waking up at night covered in sweat because of the
20 nightmares of my attack; loud noises, police lights, sirens,
21 all give me fear and anxiety.

22 "I'm broken inside. I don't ever think I will be the
23 person that I was. I try every day to do some of the simple
24 things I used to enjoy, but I can't, all because the real goons
25 took it upon themselves to torture me and shoot me. I could be

1 dead and gone, but the God I serve has other plans.

2 "I am currently undergoing therapy from my psychologist in
3 order to heal from what happened to me. I want all of them to
4 remain behind bars and off of the streets, and I, Michael
5 Jenkins, am praying for the maximum sentence for the Goon
6 Squad."

7 This is the statement on behalf of Mr. Michael Jenkins.
8 Could you stand, sir, and let Your Honor see you.

9 Thank you, sir. Thank you, Your Honor.

10 This is the victim impact statement of Mr. Eddie Terrell
11 Parker: "The very bad actions of the Rankin County Goon Squad
12 severely impacted me and has left a scar on me that will last
13 forever. I never knew the ones that were sworn to protect and
14 serve me would be the ones that I needed protection from. I
15 don't know if I will ever be able to sleep again at night. I
16 am in constant fear someone will break into my home and
17 terrorize me.

18 "I fear that I will be attacked again or even killed by
19 the police in Rankin. The humiliation, the embarrassment from
20 the sexual assault is too great for me to talk about.
21 Therefore, I am in therapy now and in the future.

22 "My family is also affected by this. They worry about my
23 safety. My financial situation has taken a very crucial hit
24 also. I am terrified of the public.

25 "My mind is all messed up and my emotions are sometimes

1 all over the map. What happened should have never happened.
2 Damien Cameron and a very long list of other victims would
3 agree, but they can't because they have been killed by the Goon
4 Squad.

5 "My life wasn't perfect, but it was mine. I doubt if I
6 will ever experience it again. I wish I didn't have to
7 experience the memory of this torture session, but I can't do
8 that either. I can't erase my memories, but I will struggle to
9 live on. They should be given what they gave me and Michael
10 Jenkins, which was no mercy, and they should be given the
11 maximum sentence."

12 That's the statement on behalf of the victim, Mr. Eddie
13 Terrell Parker. Thank you, Your Honor, Mr. Parker.

14 **THE COURT:** All right, sir.

15 **MR. SHABAZZ:** And I thank you, Your Honor.

16 **MS. CHALK:** Your Honor, next I have Ms. Mary Jenkins.

17 **THE COURT:** Okay.

18 **MS. CHALK:** Ms. Jenkins, would you state your name
19 and spell it for the record.

20 **MS. MARY JENKINS:** Mary Jenkins, M-A-R-Y
21 J-E-N-K-I-N-S.

22 **THE COURT:** Good morning.

23 **MS. MARY JENKINS:** Good morning, Your Honor.

24 I just wanted to come and say a few words about the
25 morning I found out that my son had been shot in the mouth. My

1 first instinct was just to see if he was alive, because I know
2 a bullet to the head, he probably wouldn't survive.

3 So I called Rankin County, and I couldn't get enough
4 information from them, and they kept saying they were in a
5 meeting, emergency meeting. So, finally, someone called me,
6 and I asked them about my son. I said, "Is my son alive?" And
7 this deputy I talked to was rude. I was upset, I was crying,
8 because at that point I just knew my son was dead, but I just
9 wanted information. I wanted it confirmed if he was dead or
10 not. This deputy said -- I asked him, I said, Is my son alive?
11 He said, As far as I know, he is. I said, "Well, can I see
12 him?" He said, "You can see him when I let you see him." He
13 said, "Michael is my property, is our property now." That's
14 how they referred to my son, and I'm a mother asking about my
15 child, that you can see him when I let you see him.

16 They put him on an alias, so we were calling all around
17 the hospitals trying to find him, but they put him on an alias,
18 so I was asking for Michael Jenkins, and all the hospitals were
19 saying they didn't have a Michael Jenkins. So I was at a loss.

20 And Your Honor, I don't know if you have children, but
21 when you are sitting there and you can't find any information
22 about your son, all you know is he'd been shot, that's the fear
23 that was going through me and my husband.

24 My husband was trying to prepare me for the worst. He
25 said, Mary, we will try to find him, but please be prepared for

1 the worst.

2 So Your Honor, I want the same consideration for these
3 peoples that they gave to my son when they placed a gun in his
4 mouth and pulled the trigger. They should get the maximum,
5 because my son was not an animal. I am not an animal. I am a
6 mother.

7 Although my skin is black, that doesn't make me less of a
8 woman or less of a mother when it comes to my child. These men
9 need to pay for what they did to my son.

10 And thank you, Your Honor.

11 **THE COURT:** That was a horrifying experience. Thank
12 you, ma'am.

13 **MS. LINDA RAWLS:** Your Honor, my name is Linda Rawls,
14 and I am Eddie Terrell's aunt.

15 **THE COURT:** Good morning.

16 **MS. LINDA RAWLS:** L-I-N-D-A, R-A-W-L-S. And I helped
17 raise Eddie, because my brother is deceased. His mama is ill.

18 So on January 24th, '23, he called me. He was crying, and
19 he told me what happened. I knew he wasn't lying. When I got
20 to him, he was distraught.

21 Your Honor, don't nobody know what go on behind closed
22 doors. There have been many nights he had called me. I have
23 to go. I have to go to make sure he is okay. A lot of
24 sleepless nights, won't eat, won't come around family, nothing.

25 But Your Honor, I ask that they get the maximum sentence

1 they can. They didn't deserve this. Thank you, Your Honor.

2 **THE COURT:** Thank you.

3 **MS. CHALK:** Your Honor, I'm going to read the victim
4 impact statement from Alan Schmidt, who was the victim in
5 Criminal Number 3:23cr63.

6 "My name is Alan Schmidt. I'm a victim of the former
7 Rankin County Sheriff Officers Christian Dedmon, Hunter Elward
8 and Daniel Opdyke. Before I get into the graphic details of
9 the dreadful night of December 4, 2022, when I was assaulted by
10 Dedmon, Elward and Opdyke, I want to express that I prayed to
11 God for these officers' souls to be healed of the evil within
12 to cause them to commit these acts on others. I pray every day
13 that I can forgive them one day and hopefully forget the
14 humiliation and the evil physical and sexual assaults that I
15 was endured from Dedmon, Elward, and Opdyke.

16 "I know that I'm not their only victim, and I pray for
17 each victim that has crossed paths with the Goon Squad members,
18 Dedmon, Elward and Opdyke. The acts committed upon me on
19 December 4, 2022, have impacted my life in such a negative way
20 that it will take years to lead to a somewhat normal life
21 without having flashbacks of the night of December 4, 2022.

22 "On the night of the assault, I was pulled over for an
23 expired tag near I-20 and State Street near the border of
24 Rankin and Hinds County. A traffic stop initiated, and I
25 complied with the original officer's commands. Then Christian

1 Dedmon arrived shortly after, immediately ordering officers to
2 cuff me and take me to Dedmon's vehicle.

3 "When Dedmon got to his vehicle, he yanked me down,
4 hitting my head on the back of the right quarter panel of
5 Dedmon's Rankin County Sheriff's Department-issued vehicle. My
6 head hit the panel by the wheel, leaving a dent on the vehicle,
7 and my eyes began to see spots. I could not think clearly. I
8 could not see. I could not protect myself. I was scared for
9 my life already. I was already scared for my life as I was
10 being assaulted on the side of the road, and then my life
11 flashed before my eyes. I thought I died. I knew my time was
12 over.

13 "Christian Dedmon demanded that I confess and disclose the
14 location of stolen items in Jackson, Mississippi, which I did
15 not know. Dedmon responded to my lack of knowledge by
16 discharging his gun towards me. Then I felt the barrel of the
17 gun on my temple. I was shaking. I almost used the restroom
18 on myself. I was humiliated. I was scared.

19 "It is hard to finish writing this paragraph. The images
20 are so graphic. The fear is unexplainable. I did not know it
21 was possible for any human to feel this way.

22 "Dedmon asked me several more times where the stolen items
23 were. I did not know, so I told him I did not have what he was
24 looking for. This time Dedmon shot the gun closer to my head.
25 I thought, this is it, I will never see my family again, and

1 these officers will get away with it. At this point, I think I
2 was in shock.

3 "The next thing I remember is being beaten, punched and
4 kicked. I thought to myself it would stop soon, and they were
5 on a power trip and would stop. I was wrong. It seemed like
6 it was going to last forever. Nobody helped me. Nobody
7 stepped in to stop them. Nobody cared.

8 "I wish the officers understood that I'm a human being,
9 just like them. I hurt just like them. I feel just like them.
10 I finally began to pray to God out loud to save me. I know
11 that nobody is perfect. I know that I have made mistakes in
12 the past, but I would never treat another human being or living
13 creature the way I was treated by officers sworn to protect the
14 Constitution and our rights. The louder I prayed, the harder I
15 was beaten.

16 "I began to slip into unconsciousness and passed out, and
17 the assault finally stopped. The pain was excruciating. I was
18 still cuffed from the time Dedmon arrived on scene throughout
19 the assaults, being shot at, then sexually assaulted. When I
20 was able to gather my bearings and surroundings, I was being
21 walked by Hunter Elward and Christian Dedmon, then forced to my
22 knees in front of Dedmon. Dedmon pulled his private part and
23 began hitting me in the face with it. Dedmon tried to put his
24 privates in my mouth, but I kept my mouth as tight as I could.
25 I could not help but think during this, 'What sick individual

1 does this? He has so much power over us already, so to act
2 this way, he must be truly sick in the head.' I did not think
3 I was in reality anymore. This is not the world we live in.
4 We are better than this.

5 "Since I would not touch Dedmon or Elward's privates and
6 kept screaming, no, that they were sick for doing this, they
7 pulled my pants down. I was still handcuffed and defenseless.
8 The officers started touching my private parts. Dedmon grabbed
9 my privates and said, 'My, you have a big one' and dry-humped
10 me. I kept screaming that they are sick and to let me go.

11 "The assault eventually stopped when the officers took me
12 to jail. My face was injured pretty bad, and they knew it but
13 didn't take me to the hospital or even have medical evaluate me
14 at the jail. Nobody cared. I have flashbacks to this day if
15 certain things happen. If my pants are around the knees, with
16 me pulling them up, I will think about it and get short of
17 breath. If I see a cop car, I break out in sweats. I am
18 terrified of guns and shake if I hear loud, unexpected noises.
19 When I drive down I-20, where the incident took place, I think
20 about it every time. This will not escape me.

21 "I never want to see these officers again. They sexually
22 assaulted me. They physically and mentally abused me. My life
23 has forever changed because of the actions of these officers.
24 I pray that the justice system will hold them to the fullest
25 extent of the law for all our sakes.

1 "Police are supposed to serve and protect. This is my
2 truth. This is what happened to me. Thank you for taking the
3 time to read my statement. I have the utmost faith that
4 justice will be served. Yours truly, Alan Schmidt."

5 Your Honor, the government does not have any further
6 witnesses or other impact statements to read.

7 **THE COURT:** With regard to the issue of restitution,
8 is there a presentation to make? I've seen some forms filled
9 out by some of the victims. What is the status of that?

10 **MS. CHALK:** Your Honor, all of the documentation that
11 we have received from Mr. Parker and Mr. Jenkins regarding a
12 request for restitution has been calculated and provided to
13 probation and the Court. We are seeking that restitution be
14 made to Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Parker. We are seeking restitution
15 in the amount of \$48,000, as requested by Michael Jenkins, and
16 a total of \$31,500 as requested by Eddie Parker. There was not
17 a claim of restitution made by Alan Schmidt.

18 **THE COURT:** Thank you. Do you have anything further?

19 **MS. CHALK:** Not for a victim impact statement, Your
20 Honor, or restitution. I will note for the record, you have
21 heard from the victims in this case and their families, and our
22 victims have been notified, and many of them did choose to be
23 in court today, and the others that did not did provide the
24 victim impact statement.

25 **THE COURT:** All right. I'm addressing the

1 restitution part of it. Mr. Elward, you can return to the
2 podium with your lawyer.

3 Before I impose sentence, you have the right of allocution
4 and may tell me anything that you think I need to hear before I
5 give you your sentence, with particular emphasis on matters
6 that you contend should be in mitigation of punishment. You
7 can speak, your lawyer may do so, or both of you may, and if
8 you have any witnesses, of course, you may present them. Mr.
9 Hollomon, what is your position on that?

10 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Your Honor. My client
11 would like to speak by way of allocution, but before that, we
12 have two witnesses we would like to call, Your Honor. We would
13 call, first, Mr. Eddie Elward.

14 **THE COURT:** Okay.

15 **THE CLERK:** If you would place your left hand on the
16 Bible and raise your right hand, please.

17 **(OATH ADMINISTERED.)**

18 **MR. HOLLOMON:** May I proceed, Your Honor?

19 **THE COURT:** Yes, sir.

20 **EDDIE ELWARD,**
21 **having first been duly sworn, testified as follows:**

22 **DIRECT EXAMINATION**

23 **BY MR. HOLLOMON:**

24 Q. Good morning, Mr. Elward.

25 A. Good morning.

1 Q. If you would, keep your voice up and speak into that
2 microphone so the court reporter can take down what you say.

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. State your name for the record.

5 A. Edward Douglas Elward, Jr.

6 Q. Mr. Elward, where do you live?

7 A. In Florence, Mississippi.

8 Q. Are you married?

9 A. I am.

10 Q. Who is your wife?

11 A. Terri.

12 Q. And are you related to Hunter Elward?

13 A. He is my son.

14 Q. Okay. Now, you know why we are here today, correct?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. We are here for the sentencing of Hunter on these charges.
17 What would you like the Court to know before the Court imposes
18 sentence in this case?

19 A. Well, nothing prepares a parent for this, I guess, but
20 first I would like to apologize and let the victims and their
21 family know that what happened to them is unexplainable. It
22 never should have happened, and I apologize. And I hope and
23 pray that you are able to eventually find some healing in this
24 process.

25 It's going to happen -- there's many more victims in this

1 than just these gentlemen here, with Hunter's family and all of
2 us. I think it was March when he came to me and we sat down
3 and he was able to tell me what had actually happened that
4 night and how distraught he was about what had happened. And I
5 explained to him the only way we can heal from this is to tell
6 the truth. Let's step up and do what we need to do to make
7 this right or to make it get better, and that we would look at
8 this point that we are going to do what we can to make sure
9 this doesn't happen in Rankin County again.

10 It is a terrible, terrible thing. I am very upset with
11 the county and the powers that be. He is a very good kid. He
12 was a very hard-working young man. Unfortunately, he felt the
13 need to have to work overtime, and at the Rankin County
14 Sheriff's Department, you can't work overtime unless you work
15 with these guys he was having to work with, and Brett McAlpin
16 was the worst person for him to have to work with.

17 But he is going to take and own what he did, and he is
18 going to do his time for what he did. And I pray that there's
19 some mercy somewhere along the way that helps him get back to
20 his family, to his boys, and also would help the victims and
21 their family recover or find some healing in this process.

22 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Mr. Elward.

23 **THE WITNESS:** Thank you.

24 **MR. HOLLOMON:** That's all I have of this witness,
25 Your Honor.

1 **THE COURT:** All right.

2 **MS. CHALK:** No questions.

3 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Your Honor, we would next call Terri
4 Elward.

5 **THE CLERK:** If you would place your left hand on the
6 Bible and raise your right hand, please.

7 **(OATH ADMINISTERED.)**

8 **MR. HOLLOMON:** May I proceed, Your Honor.

9 **THE COURT:** Yes, sir.

10 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you.

11 **TERRI ELWARD,**
12 **having first been duly sworn, testified as follows:**

13 **DIRECT EXAMINATION**

14 **BY MR. HOLLOMON:**

15 Q. State your name for the record.

16 A. Terri Elward.

17 Q. Ms. Elward, was that your husband Eddie that testified a
18 minute ago?

19 A. Yes, it was.

20 Q. And are you related to Hunter?

21 A. I am his mother.

22 Q. Again, you know why we are here today?

23 A. Um-hm.

24 Q. For the sentencing of Hunter. And I would ask you the
25 same question. Is there anything that you think the Court

1 should know about Hunter that you can provide to the judge this
2 morning before he imposes sentence?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Thank you, Judge, for giving me this opportunity. Hunter
6 was born and raised in Rankin County, been there all his life
7 in the Richland/Florence community. He is a seventh generation
8 Rankin Countian, and most of us still live there. He has got
9 lifelong friends. He was very active. He did all the normal
10 things that a teenage boy does. I'm not going to tell you he
11 was perfect by any sense of the imagination, but he was a good
12 kid. He hunted, he fished, he played baseball, and played
13 baseball. He hung out with his friends. He hung out with his
14 friends' parents. He was just a liked child.

15 When it comes to his family, he was always there, he was
16 always there when -- he's the youngest of four, and when his
17 older brothers and sisters got married and started -- the
18 nieces and the nephews started coming, he was the cool uncle.
19 He was the one they always wanted to play with. I couldn't
20 have been more proud of him the day he told me he was going to
21 be a Rankin County Deputy, and I'm still proud of him. I was a
22 little scared about that decision because it wasn't exactly the
23 best time to become a police officer.

24 Hunter has got three little boys, nine-year-old twins and
25 a seven-year-old, and they've really suffered from what

1 happened that night. They didn't know what to think of it.
2 They didn't know what to do. And we and his ex-wife did a
3 remarkable job of trying to keep them within their age limit of
4 what happened. They have since told me that they know what
5 daddy did was wrong but that they forgive him and that they
6 love him. And they talk to him as often on the phone as he
7 can.

8 I want you to know that the remorse that Hunter has had
9 for this has been absolutely unbearable. I've never seen him
10 this way. I've never even in one moment in my life had anybody
11 tell me or see anything that would make me think that Hunter
12 was a racist. He has friends all over the community, all over
13 the county, of every age, every color. He has never, ever
14 shown any racism that I could have -- that I've ever seen. But
15 since he's been incarcerated, I think he has learned a lot. I
16 think that he -- he's been humbled a bit. I think that when he
17 comes out of this, he is going to be a much better man.

18 I certainly believe that there's -- I hate to say the
19 cliché that things happen for a reason, because I don't really
20 think that all the time, but I do think that there's always --
21 God has a plan, and I believe that the years that he's going to
22 spend in jail are part of Hunter's plan that God has for him.

23 I just hope that as you impose this sentence on him, you
24 will remember what telling the truth took from him. It took
25 his children's whole entire childhood. By the time he gets

1 out, they will be grown, and he will have missed it. I just
2 ask -- I want to tell you that I believe that there's a lot of
3 great left in Hunter. I believe that he is going to do
4 something great when he gets out, and I just hope that you will
5 remember that as you impose this sentence.

6 **THE COURT:** All right.

7 **THE WITNESS:** Thank you.

8 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Ms. Elward. That's all I
9 have, Your Honor.

10 **THE COURT:** Does the government have any questions?

11 **MS. CHALK:** No, Your Honor.

12 **THE COURT:** Thank you, ma'am. You are excused.

13 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Judge, finally, Hunter -- Your Honor,
14 that is all we have by way of evidence. My client would like
15 to speak by way of allocution before the Court imposes
16 sentence.

17 **THE COURT:** Very well.

18 **THE DEFENDANT:** Your Honor, I would like to start off
19 by saying that I'm not a man of excuses. They leave a bad
20 taste in anybody's mouth. I've fought hard with myself ever
21 since that night, but it wasn't never -- I know when most
22 people get in trouble like this, they are only mad that they
23 got caught. A lot of people are only mad that they got caught.
24 This would probably be a lot easier for me if I was only mad
25 that I got caught, but I hate that I was involved in this, and

1 I hate what's happened to them.

2 I chose this line of work, and the key word there is
3 choice. That was my choice. And I'm not speaking for the
4 other guys, but I took that choice from them. I have to live
5 every night with what I see in my mind, the things that I've
6 been through, the things I've seen and done, and because of
7 what I did, I made them see something every night when they go
8 to sleep or try to go to sleep. And that's on me. And I would
9 like to say that I am so dadgum sorry for what happened -- or
10 to them.

11 I am apologizing to the Court, but I really want y'all to
12 know that I am sorry, if it's all right if I look at them. If
13 they are okay with it, I would like to address them directly,
14 if that's all right.

15 I don't want to get too personal, Mr. Jenkins. I see you
16 every dadgum night. And I can't go back and do what's right,
17 because to sit here and say that I could go back and do what's
18 right would mean that I needed to go back 7 years to the first
19 time I saw this type of behavior. And like I said, that is
20 just an excuse. But I hear what you said, I see the way you
21 looked, and that's just when I lay down. God, there's no
22 telling what you see. And I'm sorry. I truly am. I'm so
23 sorry that I caused that.

24 I hope and I pray -- I was raised Christian. I slacked
25 off, but I am going to do better and seek counseling. I would

1 like to learn a lot more. That's my way out. That's the only
2 choice I've got now. You know, I've got to seek that counsel.
3 And I'm -- it's such a hard road to get over mental health.
4 I'm there, I am, but I gave it to you, and I hate myself for
5 it. I hate that I gave you that, all of y'all involved. All
6 of y'all. And I'm going to pray that you get that type of
7 healing. I truly am.

8 And I accept all responsibility, and I'm going to accept
9 the Court's decision today. That was regardless. I just hope
10 you -- hope all of y'all understand that I am truly sorry.

11 **MR. EDDIE PARKER:** I forgive you, man.

12 **THE DEFENDANT:** Huh?

13 **MS. HAYNES:** He said he forgives you.

14 **THE DEFENDANT:** That's all I've got.

15 **MR. HOLLOMON:** On behalf of my client, Judge, I would
16 simply say that I do believe Hunter has accepted responsibility
17 for his actions, and he's prepared to face the consequences.
18 He hasn't tried to point the finger of blame anywhere else
19 because he accepts that responsibility. But he doesn't bear
20 sole responsibility.

21 Hunter was not a hateful or mean person when he started
22 work at the Rankin County Sheriff's Office back in 2017. But
23 there, very early on, Hunter was exposed to brutal conduct. He
24 watched as others above him in uniform and in rank turned a
25 blind eye to outrageous conduct, disregard of the law. This

1 activity was condoned and even rewarded until it became the new
2 norm. In other words, it became institutional. And
3 unfortunately, Hunter was initiated into this culture of
4 corruption in the Rankin County Sheriff's Office, and that's
5 why he is here today.

6 So, Judge, he accepts his responsibility, but he was
7 taught this behavior as a young man when he began policing over
8 there, so there is responsibility there also that we want to
9 make the Court aware of. I'm sure the Court is aware of it.

10 But Your Honor, that's all that we have at this time. We
11 rest.

12 **THE COURT:** All right, sir. You may be seated.

13 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you.

14 **THE COURT:** Does the government have any comment to
15 make in the exercise of the government's allocution?

16 **MS. CHALK:** We do, Your Honor.

17 Your Honor, we tendered the Court a sentencing memorandum
18 that we would request be filed in ECF. It was tendered to the
19 Court, as well as a sealed sentencing recommendation. We would
20 ask that that remain sealed, but we would ask that our
21 sentencing memo be filed in ECF publicly.

22 **THE COURT:** All right.

23 **MS. CHALK:** Your Honor, on January 24, 2023, this
24 defendant, Hunter Thomas Elward, and his codefendants, while
25 acting as sworn law enforcement officers, brutally terrorized

1 and carried out crimes of hate against MJ and EP at 135 Conerly
2 Road in Braxton, Rankin County, Mississippi.

3 In the evening hours of January 24th, McAlpin received a
4 complaint from a white neighbor that there were several African
5 American males staying at the home of 135 Conerly and had
6 observed suspicious behavior. McAlpin called Dedmon and told
7 him to take care of it. Codefendant Dedmon then notified this
8 defendant and other codefendants, including Daniel Opdyke,
9 shift supervisor Lieutenant Middleton about a mission, in a
10 group text that they all willingly participated in where Dedmon
11 wrote, "Are you available for a mission," a phrase all were
12 familiar with. Dedmon warned the group to the possibility of
13 cameras at the home and told his codefendants, "There's a
14 chance of cameras. Let's approach east and work easy."

15 Elward and the others knew that this meant to knock on the
16 door, that this meant, if there were cameras, to knock on the
17 door rather than knock it down. Elward responded to these
18 texts with an eyeroll emoji. Opdyke responded with a GIF of a
19 baby crying. Dedmon followed up with, "If we don't see
20 cameras, go, and no bad mug shots."

21 Based upon the texts, Middleton, Elward and Opdyke headed
22 to the Cato Volunteer Fire Department to wait for the go
23 signal. Dedmon told the group he had someone with him to cover
24 the back door. At no time was a question asked, hesitation
25 noted, or unwillingness to participate stated. Elward

1 proceeded to that meet location to gather with the others that
2 he swore to serve and protect, but serving and protecting was
3 not what they had in mind on the night of January 24, 2023.

4 As they approached the property, Dedmon, Elward, and
5 Opdyke noticed the camera above the front door, so they opted
6 to walk around to the carport door where no camera was noticed
7 or present. They did not knock. They did not ring the
8 doorbell. Instead, they began kicking open the door.

9 Once they entered, Elward and Opdyke immediately
10 encountered Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker, two African
11 American men in the hallway. Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Parker were
12 placed in handcuffs, tased multiple times, and even kicked for
13 no apparent reason. Dedmon, Elward and Opdyke continued to
14 tase and scream at Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker.

15 At this time, Hartfield then entered forcefully through
16 the back door. And within moments, Middleton and McAlpin also
17 entered the residence. Dedmon was demanding to know where the
18 drugs were, and when Mr. Parker responded that there were no
19 drugs at the home, Dedmon became more enraged, unholstered his
20 gun and fired towards the back of the house. At no time did
21 anyone intervene, yell "Stop" or render aid to Michael Jenkins
22 or Eddie Parker.

23 Elward and his codefendants continued to perpetuate the
24 hate crime. Elward and his other white codefendants continued
25 the unimaginable torture while moving the handcuffed Jenkins

1 and Parker to the living room where they were called racial
2 slurs, with the N word, monkey, and boy, and accused them of
3 taking advantage of a white woman. They warned them to go back
4 to Jackson to their side of the river. All the while, Dedmon
5 was repeatedly dry-stunning Michael Jenkins with his taser.

6 During the search of the home, Opdyke kicked in a padlock
7 door and found a BB gun and a flesh-toned dildo. The dildo was
8 placed at the end of the BB gun and Dedmon and Opdyke forced it
9 into the mouths of Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker and then
10 began to hit them in the face with it. They were then forced
11 on their backs, still handcuffed, where they were threatened
12 and attempted to be anally raped by Dedmon.

13 The abuse and torture did not end here. Not a single law
14 enforcement officer intervened, not a one of the six. Not a
15 single law enforcement officer said, "Stop," not a single law
16 enforcement officer rendered aid, even though several of them
17 were in uniform.

18 The torture and abuse continued with Elward holding MJ,
19 Michael Jenkins, and EP, Eddie Parker, down, while Dedmon
20 poured milk, alcohol, and chocolate syrup on their faces, and
21 Elward followed up by throwing eggs.

22 They were then forced to shower off the evidence of some
23 of this abuse they had just endured. After they were showered,
24 they had the handcuffs placed back on. Then several of the
25 defendants found objects inside the house to continue the

1 abuse, like a sword used by Middleton, a wooden kitchen
2 implement used by Opdyke, and pieces of wood also used. Still,
3 no one intervened and no one rendered aid.

4 The torture continued with taser hot potato. The
5 defendants wanted to see which taser was more powerful and more
6 painful, so Dedmon, Hartfield, Middleton, and Elward all took
7 turns using the tasers that Hartfield, Dedmon and Elward had.
8 They deployed these tasers and dry-stunned Jenkins and Parker
9 repeatedly and asked them which one hurt worse.

10 McAlpin and Middleton at some point stepped away just to
11 see if there were any items in the house that may be of
12 interest to them. They found some rubber bar mats and even
13 took them out to their cars to steal them. Meanwhile, Mr.
14 Jenkins and Mr. Parker were screaming and crying in pain from
15 the torture being inflicted upon them by Elward and others.
16 McAlpin and Middleton ignored those cries for help. They
17 failed to intervene and they failed to protect, as they had
18 sworn to do so. Their failure allowed Elward and his
19 codefendants to continue perpetuating the torture. And it did
20 not stop here.

21 Dedmon then removed his firearm from a holster a second
22 time when he fired out into the yard. Around the same time,
23 Elward removed his firearm from his holster, removed a bullet
24 from the chamber, stuck the gun in Michael Jenkins' mouth while
25 he was handcuffed, pulled the trigger. The gun dry-fired, but

1 that was not it. He put the firearm back inside of Michael
2 Jenkins' mouth and fired a second time. This time a bullet
3 severed Michael Jenkins' tongue and exited out of his neck,
4 causing permanent life-threatening injuries. He was left
5 bleeding on the floor right next to his friend, Mr. Parker.

6 Instead of rendering aid, this defendant and others went
7 outside to huddle up to come up with a plan. They all agreed
8 to lie, create elaborate stories to cover up the abuse and
9 torture that was inflicted inside that home. The cover-up
10 included lying to investigators, an offer to throw a plant gun,
11 manipulating the GPS data in the Rankin County Sheriff's Office
12 radios and patrol vehicles, planting a BB gun, pressuring Eddie
13 Parker to go along with what McAlpin told him, writing false
14 reports, filing false affidavits and arrest warrants, sending
15 drugs to a lab that was not even recovered at this residence
16 and not at all connected to Michael Jenkins or Eddie Parker.
17 They hid the soiled clothes, they removed a hard drive, they
18 recovered a shell casing, and they all agreed to go along with
19 it.

20 Some of the codefendants ensured everyone would go along
21 with it by planning to threaten to kill them. This defendant
22 had so little regard for the actions, additional food was
23 placed around the residence by other defendants to cause odor
24 in the coming days. And to top it off, McAlpin urinated in a
25 closet.

1 But this is not the only activity that this defendant is
2 involved in. As the Court is aware, he also pled guilty to the
3 companion information, and on December 4, 2023 (sic), this
4 defendant participated in a traffic stop of a white man, Alan
5 Schmidt. He was believed to have stolen some lawn equipment.
6 And instead of investigating the crime, this defendant watched
7 as Dedmon hit, punched and slapped Mr. Schmidt on the side of
8 Interstate 20. Elward failed to intervene, and he also failed
9 to intervene when Dedmon grabbed the gun from Opdyke's holster
10 and fired it. He also failed to intervene when Dedmon grabbed
11 Mr. Schmidt's genitalia and threatened to kill him while
12 extracting a confession.

13 This defendant never protected Alan Schmidt that night
14 from Dedmon, and he continued to participate in the crime and
15 the torture when they took Mr. Schmidt to Jackson to try and
16 recover some property.

17 The egregiousness, the seriousness of the brazen lawless
18 acts that this defendant chose to participate in, and the
19 injuries, physical, emotional and mental distress that these
20 victims have received that were committed by this defendant in
21 January 2023 and December of 2022, warrant and demand a
22 sentence at the top of the guideline range for a total sentence
23 of 241 months imprisonment.

24 And Your Honor, an evaluation of the 3553(a) factors also
25 warrant a sentence at the top of the guideline range. We would

1 ask the Court to impose a sentence of 241 months for this
2 defendant, and we also stand behind our recommendations in the
3 plea supplement that has been filed under seal.

4 **THE COURT:** All right. Mr. Hollomon, do you have
5 anything finally to say?

6 **MR. HOLLOMON:** No, Your Honor.

7 **THE COURT:** I've debated with myself whether I should
8 say anything in explanation of my decision on the sentence to
9 be imposed in this case. There's so much that could be said,
10 but I don't think any extended commentary by me is really
11 necessary because it's so clearly apparent from the egregious
12 and despicable nature of the defendant's crimes and the
13 traumatic effects that his and his codefendants' conduct have
14 had on their victims, that a sentence at the top of the
15 guidelines range is justified, more than justified. It's what
16 the defendant deserves, and it's what the community and
17 defendant's victims deserve.

18 Law enforcement officers are charged to serve and protect,
19 to protect the safety and well-being of all citizens. Despite
20 the horrendous actions of the defendants in this case, I remain
21 convinced that the vast majority of those in the law
22 enforcement community take that commitment seriously and are as
23 thoroughly appalled by the defendants' actions as the Court.

24 The defendants' actions have doubtless served to erode, or
25 in the eyes of some, I'm sure, to further erode public trust in

1 law enforcement. And in doing so, they have made us all
2 victims.

3 Therefore, the judgment of the Court is as follows: The
4 Court has considered the advisory guideline computations and
5 the sentencing factors under Title 18, United States Code,
6 Section 3553(a), and it is the judgment of the Court that you,
7 Hunter Thomas Elward, serve a term of 121 months imprisonment
8 as to Counts 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13, and Count 1
9 of Docket Number 3:23cr63, all to run concurrently to each
10 other. As to Count 9, you shall serve a term of 120 months to
11 run consecutively to all counts for a total imprisonment term
12 of 241 months in the custody of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.
13 These sentences shall run concurrently to the anticipated state
14 court sentences.

15 Based on your financial condition, the Court finds that
16 you don't have the ability to pay a fine in addition to
17 mandatory restitution, and no fine is ordered.

18 Restitution in the amount of \$79,500 is ordered and
19 payable immediately and during the term of incarceration. The
20 restitution is ordered payable to the U.S. Clerk of Court, who
21 will forward the payments to all the victims as listed on the
22 judgment order. This amount is payable jointly and severally
23 with the codefendants in this case. In the event the
24 restitution is not paid in full prior to the termination of
25 supervised release, you are ordered to enter into a written

1 agreement with the financial litigation program of the U.S.
2 Attorney's Office for payment of the remaining balance.

3 Additionally, the value of future discovered assets may be
4 applied to offset the balance of criminal monetary penalties.
5 You may be included in the Treasury Offset Program allowing
6 qualified federal benefits to be applied to offset the balance
7 of criminal monetary penalties.

8 The term of imprisonment shall be immediately followed by
9 three-year terms of supervised release as to all counts to run
10 concurrently with each other. Within 72 hours of release from
11 the custody of the Bureau of Prisons, you shall report to the
12 probation office in the district to which you are released.

13 While on supervised release, you shall comply with the
14 mandatory conditions pursuant to Title 18, United States Code,
15 Section 3583(d). Further, the Court finds that the standard
16 conditions of supervision as listed on the judgment order and
17 in part G of the presentence investigation report, which have
18 been adopted by this Court, are reasonably related to the
19 factors set forth in Title 18, United States Code, Section
20 3553(a)(1), (a)(2)(B), (C), and (D), and involve no greater
21 deprivation of liberty than reasonably necessary for the
22 purposes set forth in that section.

23 Further, these conditions are consistent with the policy
24 statements issued by the Sentencing Commission pursuant to 26,
25 United States Code, Section 994(a). Therefore, you will comply

1 with the standard condition of supervision in the judgment
2 order, which includes the prohibition of possessing a firearm.

3 Then there are special conditions now imposed in addition:
4 One, you must not communicate or otherwise interact with the
5 victims MJ, EP or AS, either directly or through someone else,
6 without first obtaining the permission of the probation
7 officer.

8 You shall not incur new credit -- the second one, you
9 shall not incur new credit charges or open additional lines of
10 credit without the approval of the probation officer unless you
11 are in compliance with the installment payment schedule.

12 Three, you shall provide the probation office with access
13 to any requested financial information.

14 Four, you must pay outstanding restitution imposed by the
15 Court in accordance with the schedule of payments sheet of the
16 judgment, and you must also notify the court of any changes in
17 economic circumstances that might affect your ability to pay
18 restitution.

19 Five, based on the nature of the offenses, you shall
20 submit your person, property, house, residence, vehicle, papers
21 or office to a search conducted by the United States Probation
22 Officer. Failure to submit to a search may be grounds for
23 revocation of release. You shall warn any other occupants that
24 the premises may be subject to searches pursuant to this
25 condition. An officer may conduct a search pursuant to this

1 condition only when reasonable suspicion exists that you have
2 violated a condition of your supervision and the areas to be
3 searched contain evidence of this violation. Any search must
4 be conducted at a reasonable time and in a reasonable manner.

5 The Court notes that if it erred in the calculation of the
6 sentencing guidelines, the Court would have imposed the same
7 sentence for a variance based on an offense conduct in this
8 case, your characteristics, and the other factors found at
9 Title 18, United States Code, Section 3553.

10 It is further ordered that you pay a special assessment
11 fee of \$100 per count, for a total of \$1,200, which is
12 mandatory and due immediately. You are remanded to the custody
13 of the U.S. Marshals Service to await designation by the Bureau
14 of Prisons. That concludes the Court's sentence in the case.
15 Is there anything further from the government or counsel for
16 the defendant?

17 **MS. CHALK:** Not from the government, Your Honor.

18 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Your Honor, if the Court please, I do
19 believe I heard the Court state that this sentence was to run
20 concurrently to an anticipated state court sentence.

21 **THE COURT:** That is correct. I did say that.

22 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Your Honor. The other
23 thing I want to ask, Judge, we would ask the Court to recommend
24 designation to the Bureau of Prisons facility in Talledega.

25 **THE COURT:** All right. You realize that the Court

1 doesn't have the prerogative, the power to do that, but the
2 Court can make recommendations and oftentimes the Bureau of
3 Prisons does adopt and follow recommendations of the sentencing
4 court, so that will be the recommendation of the Court.

5 **MR. HOLLOMON:** Thank you, Your Honor. That's all we
6 have.

7 **THE COURT:** Very well, then. That concludes this
8 hearing, and Court is recessed until 1:00.

9 (HEARING CONCLUDED)

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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

I, Teri B. Norton, RMR, FCRR, RDR, Official Court Reporter for the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, appointed pursuant to the provisions of Title 28, United States Code, Section 753, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a correct transcript of the proceedings reported by me using the stenotype reporting method in conjunction with computer-aided transcription, and that same is a true and correct transcript to the best of my ability and understanding.

I further certify that the transcript fees and format comply with those prescribed by the Court and the Judicial Conference of the United States.

S/ *Teri B. Norton*
TERI B. NORTON, RMR, FCRR, RDR
OFFICIAL COURT REPORTER